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ABSTRACT

The essential task of sharpening students' sensitivities may be facilitated by the curriculum, instructional program, and personnel of the school. Aesthetic education is basic because it is founded on the creative integration of sensing, feeling, intuiting, and thinking. The arts curriculum may be used to sharpen students' awareness and sensitivities, and may encourage increased aesthetic awareness and understanding by use of the critical/appreciative model. Students ponder what is unusual about a particular work through such exploratory questions as why the work is important, under what constraints the artist was working, and what individual responses the student feels toward the work; such questions draw the student into participation through inquiry. Implications for teachers, administrators, and counselors include the following: establish a conducive environment for exploration of aesthetic appreciation; foster philosophical and contemporary aesthetics education in the teacher education curriculum; provide education for the arts educator to view aesthetics beyond his or her own discipline; use aesthetics systems education to teach about aesthetics systems of different cultures; and provide opportunities for students to share their aesthetic experiences. (DF)

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Aesthetics Are Basic

The purpose of this paper is to make a case for "Aesthetics Are Basic," and from the arguments to draw implications for schooling. While the task, in a sense, is to defend a thesis which we have accepted a priori by virtue of the fact that we responded to the call for position papers on the theme, "Aesthetics Are Basic," we hope to clarify the state of affairs concerning both basics and aesthetics. We plan to do so by logic and conceptual analysis.

While noting two obsolete definitions for "aesthetics," (1. "of or pertaining to sensuous perception, received by the senses," and 2. "of or pertaining to the appreciation or criticism of the beautiful"), the Oxford English Dictionary gives the following Twentieth-century definition for "aesthetics": "of or pertaining to...things perceptible by the senses, things material,...also 'perceptive,' sharp in the sense." Often "aesthetics" are used synonymous with the arts because we may view aesthetics as the philosophy of art. In this vein it might be deduced that "arts are basic," and that may be the case, but that is not the theme of this paper. Aesthetics are confined in this paper to the way stimuli or phenomena are perceived by the senses. The theme held here would be better stated as: "Sharpening sensitivities is basic." Before concluding our paper we will show how the arts may be one of the ways through which sensitivities are sharpened.

"Basic" has a number of meanings. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "basic" as "of, pertaining to, or forming a base; fundamental, essential." "Basic" in the first sense is that on which other things are built. It is, no doubt, this meaning which underlies reading, writing, and arithmetic as basics in education. That is, to be able to read, write, and calculate is the foundation upon which other learning and the acquisition of knowledge are based. Thinking and speaking may be added at a higher level of schooling as

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basic, as may subjects such as mathematics, science, and history. While this meaning of "basic" may hold in some cases, it has not stood the test of experience for all. That is, people have succeeded without these "basics" albeit the exceptions may not be numerous. With "aesthetics" and "basic" briefly defined, we proceed next to a closer analysis of our terms.

If aesthetics pertains to stimuli perceived by the senses, one of our first tasks is to note that our senses do not perceive all the phenomena before us. For example, a dog may respond to a sound we may never hear. Our vision is also limited. For example, when phenomena are observed, light energy passes from that stimulus to our eyes and sets up the sensation of vision. The eye, then, is sensitive to light (or luminous) energy. Light, however, occupies a small portion of the electromagnetic spectrum. This wide ranging spectrum extends from very short and penetrating gamma rays to the very long radio and electrical waves. Visible light, that perceived by the senses, is limited to a narrow portion of the spectrum. "Aesthetics" as defined in this paper refers to sharpening one's sensitivities within one's human limitations. To continue life, to function without being perceptive, to receive stimuli with dulled senses, is to be anasthetized. We do not intentionally put anesthetics in the curriculum, but we may do so by not including those areas and experiences in the curriculum which intentionally sharpen the senses.

Traditionally curriculum development includes reading, writing and arithmetic. Our paper recognizes these as foundational and argues for the addition of aesthetics. Next the word "basic", as it relates to schooling, is examined in the following paragraphs.

Education is built upon more than a curriculum cornerstone. "Basic" to the educator may refer to primary human needs; to its prerequisite qualities or its applicability. It is said, for instance, that physiological

needs must be met before attending to belonging needs, or using Maslow's terms, D-needs are to be met first and then B-needs can be met. This ordering of needs has an appealing logic to it, but experiential evidence does not always bear out the logic. Nancy Hanks, former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, tells a story about the people in London during the Second World War, who demanded paintings be placed in the air raid shelters despite the risk to the people's safety as a consequence of having lights on in the shelters by which to view the art work.

To state that something is basic, is to state that it is a prerequisite. It is, perhaps, this meaning that attends the idea of discipline or respect as basic. It is often said that before one can learn anything from a teacher, one must first have respect for the teacher. Or, in a similar vein, before a teacher can motivate a learner, there must first be discipline in the classroom. The most popular usage of "basic" is essential, necessary or fundamental. In this case it seems to be agreed that if something is basic to something else, the latter cannot exist without the former.

Basic means prerequisite while at the same time it is a component part. The prerequisite to a course in photography may be the accessibility of a camera because the camera is a component to most photographic imagery.

In considering applicability, "basic" may have still another dimension. The term "basic" seems to connote in common discussion and in the daily newspaper the terms lasting, applies to all, and applies everywhere. This set of assumptions poses a very rigorous task on those who would say which attitudes and behaviors and what knowledge are, indeed, basic. Even if one adds "in our country or society or culture" to the "applies..." above, the task is a most difficult one.

Having looked at various definitions for"Aesthetics" and "Basic", the task of the writers now becomes that of establishing that "Aesthetics

Are Basic" and then drawing implications for schools. Perhaps the theme is better stated: If "aesthetics" pertains to "things perceptible by the senses" or "perceptive, sharp in the sense," and if "basic" means forming a base, fundamental, or essential (at times foundational), and if the student, the curriculum, the instructional program and the personnel of the school are the focal points for establishing "Aesthetics Are Basic," then the task herein is to demonstrate that sharpening sensitivities is essential to students, and this may be achieved through the curriculum, the instructional program, and the personnel of the school.

Sharpening the senses has not always been the goal of aesthetic education. Earlier in our paper we noted the obsolete definitions for "aesthetics." Reviewing these definitions in a historical context may be the surest way to illustrate that "aesthetics" as a curriculum proposed for the eve of the Twenty-first century differs widely from aesthetic curriculum on the eve of the Twentieth century.

In the United States at the mid-point of the nineteenth century, art (aesthetic) education included the study of beauty. The rationale for appreciation of the beautiful appeared in the form of fostering good taste. It was thought that persons could obtain good taste through frequent experience with beautiful objects. This training would allow students to overcome their own tastes. Unconsciously then, students would replace their own "bad" tastes with what they knew to be true and good tastes. Good taste was based upon the definition of art that was popular between 1750 and 1900, a definition inherited by the twentieth century: "art is the creation of the beautiful." This definition had derived from the conviction that the purpose of art, its goal, its result, its highest value, and its most distinguishing feature was beauty. For 150 years it had been such a satisfactory definition that little thought was given to improving it.

Beauty, an ambiguous notion, could be an interjection, an expression of rapture or satisfaction more than it was a definition. Beauty was identified with art of the Sixteenth century -- which was the kind of art being taught in the schools at the turn of the Twentieth century. Beauty was identified as having a special equilibrium, precision, clarity of form, an essence of harmony.

Sometimes the definition of beautiful was subject to variations or replaced by the concept "aesthetic experience". This concept was probably associated with beauty until the impact of 20th century works of art. In the visual arts Cubism, Fauvism and German Expressionism were examples of what the layman thought were unbeautiful art styles. Art of this century might produce strong emotions, astonishment or shock. It was capable of arousing the psyche of humans instead of repressing it.

Years were lost, delaying the birth of a curricula pertaining to the sharpening of an individual's senses while educators seemed to reject modern art and reflect instead upon their students the artistic tastes of the laymen.

Spearheading modern-day aesthetic education was Herbert Read. His book Education Through Art provided a link between the aesthetics of modern art and practice in the classroom. Read valued in modern art the same kind of freedoms he wished the child to enjoy in his/her process of self-development and self-discovery. Education should foster individual growth. Unlike educational systems of the past, Read wanted to develop as the most important function of education, a sense of psychological orientation (Read, 1943:7). He labeled this aesthetic education -- "the education of those senses upon which consciousness, and ultimately the intelligence and judgment of the human individual are based." (Read, 1943:7).

Other art educators took up the banner of aesthetic sensibility. Viktor Lowenfeld called it aesthetic sensitivity or the sensitivity for harmonious relationships. Lowenfeld, like Read, believed that the whole personality is affected by aesthetic sensitivity.

> Aesthetic sensitivity not only refers to art but to any experience in which the senses are brought into harmonious and habitual relationship with the external world. Thus, aesthetic sensitivity appears to be essential for any well organized and integrating thinking, feeling, and perceiving, and the expression of these... aesthetic sensitivity is not arbitrary, not bound by rules. It may start on any level, conscious or unconscious, intuition or planned, and anywhere -- in life, in play, in art. That is why our whole personality is affected by aesthetic sensitivity (Lowenfeld, 1959:10).

In believing that aesthetic sensitivity is present throughout life, a state of mind, Lowenfeld's experimental philosophy laid a foundation for modern-day educators who continue to justify the rationale that art education serves to develop aesthetic sensibilities.

Art educator June McFee stated in her book Preparation for Art that one way art education can help to promote continued improvement in aesthetic qualities of the environment was by showing the contribution of the fine arts to the applied arts. She believed that the role of the teacher is that of a tastemaker, one who reinforces or opposes the child's acquired attitudes and helps to develop confidence in his or her own ability to make judgments. While Lowenfeld thought that believing in an external standard for "taste," as McFee called it, would give rise to dogmatic laws, McFee used "good taste" as a means for arriving at self-confidence in decision making and not in taste making as an end in itself as proposed by art educators over a hundred years earlier.

Aesthetics at the threshold of the Twenty-first century are basic because they are appropriate for the times. Aesthetics of the Nineteenth and

early Twentieth centuries violated individuals by stressing appreciation of the beautiful for the purpose of putting upon the student the teacher's values about "taste". Students were denied knowledge about certain experiences (e.g., Twentieth century or modern art) because it lacked beauty. Contemporary aesthetics may include a redefinition for art making the entire human environment a work of art which can be used to maximize opportunities for learning.

Art educator Melvin Alexenburg believes that humans must have a new relationship with nature in the future. In the past, human experiences have attempted to control nature. But "future man must learn how to control with nature -- through dialogue with her" (Alexenburg, 1976:10). Alexenburg labels this dialogic art. The most extreme manifestation of the cultural revolution in art has been labeled "life-art" -- the loving of the whole of one's life as a work of art.

The implications for education indicate that if students, like artists, can be brought to feel that their own experiences (in themselves) are the most important and precious things they have they may give them their very best efforts to make them "optimal as time spent and as experience, to make them art-like. All of learning and of loving and of living for its own sake can be thought of as dialogic art" (Alexenburg, 1976:10).

As the artist and student take up "arting" with their environment through dialogic art, they begin to form new relationships experienced aesthetically. These aesthetic experiences are meaningful in themselves because the relationships are intrinsically valued.

Aesthetics are basic through dialogic art by making every individual an "artist" responsible for creating his or her ultimate work of art his or her life itself, and by forming the student's life into a work of art, into an aesthetic product, by experiencing the intrinsic worth and meaning of every

moment presented to him or her living (Alexenberg, 1976:12). Individuals complete aesthetic sensitivity by becoming a work of art themselves.

We have now established that aesthetics has changed. The aesthetics of the past was verging on anaesthetics, for only certain stimuli (the beautiful) should be responded to with sharpened sensitivities. Perception was dulled for other stimuli. Furthermore, we have established that sensing and feeling one's environment may generate a holistic experience which may be referred to as aesthetic.

Before proceding further we need to consider the environment which we sense, perceive, and experience. Sometimes it is referred to as the "real world" or the stimuli but in any case it is what, for the most part, our senses sense. These stimuli may be objects, or other sense arousers. They have elements representing intelligible qualities and relationships such as plot, smell, shape, texture, color, or rhythm resulting from the manipulation of the natural or man-made material world. These material stimuli are objective and exist outside the observer.

When observers perceive the stimuli, they perceive more than what is present. Humans perceive more than a carved block of marble, or masonry affixed with shingles. When they experience perception their psychological energies are at work sensing, intuiting, feeling and thinking. Each human has this creative process going on <u>inside</u> as a result of perceiving the external stimulus. And individuals perceive differently with varying capacities for understanding or enjoying what they perceive because each has different maturity, culture or interests. Edmund Burke Feldman in his book <u>Art as Image and Idea</u> observed that perception involves the "creative integration of the sensory excitations and psychological expectations aroused in the viewer by the organization of elements embodied in visual form" (Feldman, 1967:280). He also likes to think of this internal process as perceiving

"the manner in which everything that is to be found in the object is put together, as the total interrelation of whatever is discriminable (the expressive as well as the formal elements) in the object" (Feldman, 1967:278).

Human acts of perception are subjective: aesthetic responses. Hence it might be said that the environment, the stimuli, the objects...all have the potential of triggering an aesthetic experience within the human being. For an example a saguaro cactus has a size, a shape, a texture, and a color. When the person perceives the saguaro (and its surroundings) the aesthetic experience may not rest solely on the shoulders of the viewer. Nature was responsible for the organization of the visual and tactile elements which ultimately resulted in the spiney vertical form.

Perceived stimuli have certain elements or attributes which have potential for the experiencing person. Put in form of a model, S---O---R, we see each component, the Stimuli, the Organism, and the Response being a fundamental, essential aspect of the model. While we may discuss or emphasize one aspect, the model is an integral, holistic one. Hence, "Aesthetics Are Basic" because even though we have varying capacities to understand or enjoy what we perceive, all things have the potential of being sensed, experienced, and responded to. Put in another way, sharpened sensitivities are essential, fundamental, foundational, and universal.

Now students, as human beings, are constantly having experiences and have the potential for creatively integrating their sensory excitations with psychological expectations: the aesthetic experience. Our choices as educators are to ignore the nature of these experiences and leave them to chance, or to take a more positive stand. We may refine a student's sensitivities and heighten a student's experiences or we can leave these to develop at the whim of chance. A discussion next on how the aesthetic experience

may take place will assist us in establishing that "aesthetics are basic"; and throw light on these illusive experiences shared by all humankind.

In considering the aesthetic experience, we will examine several ways it may manifest itself in our lives: through empathy (and resulting psychic distance, funding and fusion) and gestalt. Because the discovery of how aesthetic experiences occur has not yet taken place, we propose that perhaps a combination of empathy and gestalt methods may meet the needs of this paper.

Empathy does two things: it describes what happens to a perceptive person and explains the origin of a person's feeling about an object. Empathy occurs when a person becomes concerned, identifies with, becomes involved in, or projects into the perceived stimulus. Empathy begins with a motor response to a thing perceived.

Psychic distance is the degree of personal involvement (empathy) of a person with phenomena. Occasionally when viewing a television program we must remind ourselves that what we are seeing is unreal. It is conjectured that children may have nightmares because they do not have distinct psychic distances. In traditional painting, large frames were used to help create psychic distances for the viewer. Today artists may use no frames as if to eliminate any distance between art and life.

Psychic distance assumes a person has empathy. If a person has no empathy the perception of the stimulus is placed in the distance because the stimulus is perceived as having no concreteness, credibility or relevance. In the past, the most desirable psychic distance a person could have in an aesthetic experience was as great a distance as possible without having the perception disappear. That is, at one extreme lies empathy, and at the other lies the confusion of art and life. The perceptive person has an intensity of involvement without losing personal identity.

The view of the early 20th century psychologist Edward Bullough was that psychic distance could almost be predicted according to the perceived art form. The dramatic arts and dance had short psychic distances, music and architecture showed the greatest psychic distance, while painting fell in the middle distance. Since Bullough's time, music may have achieved more credibility. Through increased technical knowledge, music has become an important part of all our lives -- and may be even assure our close encounters with a third kind!

Fusion and funding are terms used by Dewey to describe the sum of our perceptive experiences on any given occasion. Fusion and funding used interchangeably represent the assemblage of perceptions we have had at different times -- fusing into a whole until a single dominant quality is evident.

Until we have stopped having perceptions which are fused into our memory banks, material phenomena, even the same phenomena, will continue to be of interest to us. We the perceivers change between perceptions of that stimulus. The collection of perceptions may build upon each other or oppose each other. One of the authors remembers her first visit to a French chapel designed by the architect Le Corbusier on a hill in Ronchamp. It was a disappointing rainy day. When she finally sought shelter inside, she found candles were all aglow and a group of nuns were lifting their voices in French song. The uplifting perception the author had of this architectural landmark was not the same a few years later when she returned with a group of students on tour. Eagerly entering the chapel she perceived this time not peace and order but bright hot lights, irreverent cables and camera crews filming in one of the side chapels. Should she view this chapel in the future again, she will no doubt, carry these aesthetic experiences into her third perception of this artistic momument.

Closure and gestalt represent terms examining the aesthetic experience from another viewpoint. This point of view recognizes that we may seek completeness of structure and meaning in a present perception without recollecting similar experiences. We seek the most simple way to achieve closure for maximum efficiency, deriving meanings and feelings from the patterns of energy distribution in ourselves set off by the perceived stimulus. This results in a perceptive art which has no memory.

We have established now that the aesthetic experience is one which takes place within us. Empathy and gestalt theories provide us with explanations of how this experience may occur. It is not necessary to understand how the aesthetic experience happens in order to have one. But awareness is important to the promotion of aesthetics in our schools.

In order to sharpen the student's sensitivities and awareness it seems reasonable to use a curriculum that is designed primarily for that purpose, that is the arts curriculum. The cultivation of aesthetic experiences should not be left to chance.

While the years have brought no consensus as to how the aesthetic experience occurs, they have brought many ways educators may encourage increased awareness and understanding about a painting, a piece of music, the theater arts, a sculpture, a building, a photograph, a suit of clothes or literature. Some have referred to this approach to aesthetics as a critical-appreciative model. From the data brought in by the senses, to the integration of feelings generated by the senses, we have shown that the perceptive person may have an intensity of involvement without losing his/her personal identity and confusing art and life. In the arts curriculum students might ponder what is unusual about a certain piece of art, a particular building or a piece of music through exploratory questioning. The students

might consider what is appropriate about each. What do we mean by appropriate? How can such a small piece of work create such interest, so much discussion? Under what constraints was the artist working, the dancer dancing? What affect did the constraints have on the art piece, the performance? What are our individual responses to the object, to the experience? Were they ones of surprise? Were they ones of satisfaction or displeasure? Do we recall tasting, smelling, touching, seeing, or hearing anything that we savor, that we hold on to, that we cherish? Imagine the most beautiful person in the world, describe him/her. These are all questions which might contribute to funded perceptions about something elusive such as beauty.

Notice that the student is drawn into participation, through inquiry; there is no a priori notion of how these stimuli are perceived. The student is not put upon. Notice that responses to questions used in the study of beauty, for example, depend upon the senses, the sharpened senses, the thought processes, the expressive processes, and the imagination. If used properly, they could engage the student in being a critic-actor, and that is one of the basic characteristics of the adolescent.

So, in still another way we can say that "Aesthetics Are Basic". They are basic because they are founded upon the creative integration of the sensing, feeling, intuiting, and thinking of individuals. Such fusion of sensory excitations and psychological expectations is a well accepted goal of all human beings.

To sharpen one's senses, one must practice. To practice requires discipline. To compare one work with another, to understand the lines of a poem, to move with the dancer requires respect. In that sense, too, "Aesthetics Are Basic."

When considering "Aesthetics Are Basic" we may also derive many implications for teachers, administrators, counselors and learners who do not view themselves contributors to aesthetic experiences. We argue that each person can contribute to helping students be more aware, to use and to sharpen the various senses--all in the hope of increasing personal student involvement for aesthetic experiencing.

The role of the educator may be to establish an environment in which the student may empathize and have an opportunity to perceive with little or no psychic distance the world's phenomena. This effort assumes that school personnel are themselves sensitive to the environment and the possibilities of its contribution to aesthetics. If aesthetic experiences are also part of processing (funding and fusion), of participating, of problem solving, why not encourage students to be part of constructing a stimulating environment? The Herbert Hoover Junior High School in San Jose, California, is a beautiful example of students, teachers, and community persons intensively applying mosaic designs on many exterior walls of the buildings. The psychic distance usually attributed to the perception of architecture has been reduced as the students have increased their degree of personal environment with their surroundings.

If psychic distances differ among the arts as Burrough suggested, the role of the educator is to encourage an environment in which a symmetry in the arts may take place. That is, theater arts and music and painting will each seem concrete, credible and relevant to the student; not one more than the other.

There are further implications of the study of aesthetics for the school, the curriculum, the personnel. First of all it would appear that the teachers would need to be, to some extent, educated in philosophical and contemporary

aesthetics, hence further implications for teacher education. While we assume that the teachers in the arts are educated in aesthetics, they need to be aware of teaching the aesthetics aspect of their art form. One of the difficulties facing the fine arts educator today is the encouragement of perception along contemporary artistic frontiers. Just because artists utilize and produce products out of stuff intended originally for purposes other than art, or just because the artist works with nature, these products are not devoid of aesthetic worth. Too often the lay person dulls the senses to such unusual artistic media or processing.

Furthermore, the arts educator may need training to view aesthetics beyond his/her own discipline. This aesthetics education is an accumulated arts study about aesthetic experiences--a meta-aesthetics education (hence "basic").

And finally aesthetics systems education (those other than and including the Western world) is a proposed educational direction which would teach about different aesthetic systems; aesthetics of different cultures to stimulate additional and sharper sensitivity in a rapidly developing multi-cultural environment.

Curriculum makers need to be aware of the necessity for learners to share their aesthetic experiences and sometimes that sharing does not fit into a box schedule.

Besides the in-school implications, there are carry-over implications. For instance, students whose senses have been sharpened are not likely to be insensitive to various aspects of the school or out-of-school environments, whether that be nature, art forms or other humans. Students may, indeed, be called to personal or political action to change environmental conditions. And, to be sure, persons who have experienced the sharing of aesthetic experiences in schools will search for ways to share themoutside of school.

For example, students who have been able to share their individual experiences in the classroom may continue to analyze and recognize the importance of aesthetic experiences in later living while increasing their creative process of integrating their perceptions. Viktor Lowenfeld wrote, "It is the aesthetic experience which is mainly responsible for kindling the creative spirit in early years and later for keeping it afire" (Lowenfeld, 1959:6).

It is our contention then, that "Aesthetics Are Basic," that they have an essential place in the lives of humans, and should be an integral part of the school. Aesthetics should join updated versions of reading, writing and arithmetic, possibly identified as the fourth "R": arts.

If aesthetics are included in the curriculum of the schools, then schools can contribute to that goal implicit in our paper and so beautifully stated by Harry Broudy, as "Enlightened Cherishing." If we are going to be Happy as proposed by Socrates, Self-actualized as advocated by Maslow, Individuated as proposed by Jung, or Educated as subscribed to by most of us, then "Enlightened Cherishing" would appear a goal basic to us all, and another way of saying, "Aesthetics Are Basic."

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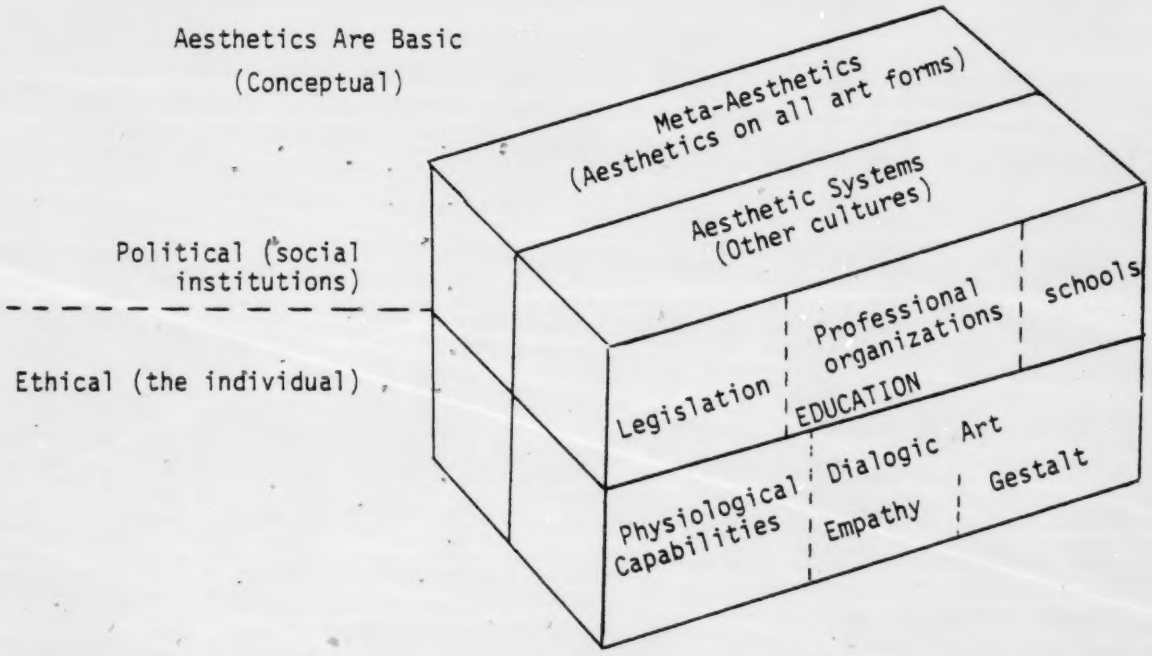
Illustrations

Growth of "Aesthetics Are Basic" Education (Historical)

	19th Century	20th Century	Eve of 21st Century
Educational Goal:	Obtaining good taste	Self and personality-development and self-discovery.	Holistic experience. Individual completes the aesthetic experience by <u>becoming</u> a work of art oneself.
Stimulus:	16th century art.	Contemporary art.	Entire human environment.
Process:	Senses need not perceive things <u>known</u> as bad.	Creative integration of the sensory excitations and psychological expectations aroused in the viewer by the stimulus.	Ones own aesthetic experiences are the most important and precious things one has.



Poems

Anesthetics dull feelings, sensitivity, shades of distinction, pain...
Medicine, greed, jealousy, slavery, unfeeling are anesthetics.
Aesthetics sharpen feelings, sensitivity, enrich living, being...
Poems transmit love, caring, fears, subtleties, freedom...elicit aesthetics.

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